

# The Philosophy of Forgiveness - Volume II

## New Dimensions of Forgiveness

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**Vernon Series in Philosophy of Forgiveness**



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**Adrian Switzer**, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Missouri Kansas City (UMKC) where he specializes in Kant and post-Kantian Continental Philosophy. Co-translator of books on Parmenides and Kant, and author of numerous journal articles and book chapters on such figures as Kant, Nietzsche, Foucault, Deleuze, Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Luc Nancy and Luce Irigaray, Dr. Switzer is currently completing a manuscript on the aesthetics and politics of the student protests in Paris in May 1968.

# Introduction

## New Dimensions of Forgiveness

Court D. Lewis

Volume II of Vernon Press's series on the Philosophy of Forgiveness is named *New Dimensions of Forgiveness* for a specific reason—each chapter contained within seeks either to develop and explain a conception of forgiveness in a new way, or to offer a unique explanation of how to conceptualize and make sense of forgiveness. Together, they break new ground, support new conclusions and understandings, and illuminate new conceptual spheres of forgiveness.

Like Volume I's *Explorations of Forgiveness*, my goal with Volume II is to stay out of the way and let each author make the strongest case possible for her or his respective position. To reiterate, it is my hope that this series will create dialogue, both within philosophy but also between philosophy and other fields of study. Specialization is valuable because it allows researchers the opportunity to become experts in a particular field, offering insights that might otherwise go unnoticed by novices. However, specialization can also create barriers that hinder dialogue, which then prevent the full-understanding of an issue or topic. It is sometimes good to push the boundaries of research, especially if one is motivated to both create a rich intra- and inter-disciplinary dialogue and foster a more complete understand of the topic. For, it is only by stepping back and looking at a problem from new and different perspectives that we are sometimes able to see the previously unnoticed solution.

With that said, this is a book of philosophical writings that range from contemporary forgiveness research and literature, to Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas, and G.W.F. Hegel. So, no matter the reader's research interests, there is a

contribution that she or he will find valuable. In terms of organization, instead of breaking the volume into several sections, chapters are organized in such a way as to create a series of dialogues, with some level of overlap between each chapter. The following will provide a brief overview of each chapter, detailing key features of each.

The book opens with Leonard Kahn's chapter "Third-Party Forgiveness," in which he presents a case against the possibility of third-party forgiveness. Using two recent terror attacks as focal points of discussion, Kahn examines the "standard account" of forgiveness, the relationship between acts of forgiveness and speech-acts, and delineates the limits of a legitimate standing to forgive. More specifically, Kahn investigates the moral standing of a third-party bystander, who has no close moral connection to the victim(s), yet attempts to forgive the wrongdoer. Kahn puts forward a series of compelling arguments to show that not only would such an example not meet the requirements of forgiveness, but neither would examples involving more intimate relationships. He ends his chapter by showing how accepting third-party forgiveness as a legitimate type of forgiveness only serves to devalue 'forgiveness' as a moral term.

One of the interesting features of Kahn's chapter is the role of emotional feelings within the act and speech-acts of forgiveness, and Chapter 2 focuses specifically on these emotional states. In "The Heart of the Matter: Forgiveness as an Aesthetic Process," A.G. Holdier explores the aesthetic components of forgiveness, and argues that in order to fully-understand "real-world" forgiveness, we must understand the emotional affective states that inform the "phenomenological process that negotiates our cognitive judgments regarding forgiveness." So, instead of focusing on epistemic or moral concerns, he expands the scope of the discussion into the periphery of the philosophical conversation, in order to build a philosophical structure around the everyday experience of forgiveness as a peace-seeking enterprise.

Unlike Holdier's emphasis on the aesthetic process of forgiveness, in "Forgiveness and Warranted Resentment," Frederik Kaufman stress the epistemic concerns of forgiveness regarding the nature of reason-giving and warranted resentment. Kaufman worries that if apology makes warranted resentment unwarranted (as he suggests many contemporary writers maintain), then forgiveness loses its elective nature. Opposed to such a conclusion, Kaufman examines the nature of moral deliberation and reason-giving to argue that forgiveness should remain elective and be marked by victims relinquishing *warranted* resentment, not unwarranted resentment.

Tying together the emotional and epistemic themes of the previous two chapters, Kathleen Poorman Dougherty's "Responsibility and Self-Forgiveness in *The Story of Lucy Gault*" inspects William Trevor's novel *The Story of Lucy Gault* for insights into the nature of self-forgiveness. Dougherty argues that the novel prompts us to reconsider the kinds of actions thought to make self-forgiveness morally challenging, showing that self-forgiveness can be extremely difficult, even in morally neutral cases. Second, it encourages us to reflect upon the dependence of self-forgiveness on interpersonal forgiveness, demonstrating that self-forgiveness must sometimes function independently of other-forgiveness. Finally, it challenges our understanding of the relationship between responsibility and forgiveness. Dougherty's inspection of the novel raises some intriguing and difficult questions about responsibility, ignorance, personal identity, and how these influence the nature of self-forgiveness in tragic ways that are sometimes inconsistent with human flourishing.

Chapter 6 features Ryan Michael Murphy's "Forgiveness and Time: Attitudes, Dispositions, and Philosophical Charity." Murphy investigates the possibility of future-oriented *forgivingness*—attitudinal dispositions that make it more likely for agents to forgive in cases of wrongdoing that *might* occur in the future. Moving beyond mere attitudinal dispositions, in this thought-provoking chapter Murphy provides

valuable insights into the temporal nature of forgiveness and its role in illuminating a new way to consider the moral dimensions of philosophical methodology.

Though conceptual in nature, Murphy's chapter is concerned with the pragmatic outcomes of forgiveness, which is also the focus of John McClellan's "Trusting Again." McClellan examines the nature of forgiveness and how it relates to trust. By examining cases of infidelity, and the common desire of victims to forgive their betrayers, McClellan argues that trusting again can be epistemically justifiable, even if a victim's trust is not based on a well-grounded set of reasons that support the betrayer's *future* trustworthiness. Realizing the difficulty of such a position, McClellan's underlying goal is to illustrate a possible irreconcilable tension between epistemic norms and an admirable form of relational forgiveness.

In "The Asymmetry of Forgiveness," Mariano Crespo examines the asymmetrical relationship between forgiveness's "settling of debts" and its resulting positive attitudes toward the wrongdoer, in order to offer insights into both the metaphysics of being a person and a general theory of action. By examining the metaphysical nature of the forgiver's and wrongdoer's moral life as it relates to forgiveness, Crespo emphasizes the voice of the victim. This shift in emphasis paves the way for Elisabetta Bertolino's chapter, "Forgiveness, One's Voice and the Law."

Bertolino analyzes two different voices of forgiveness: the voice of individuals and the voice of institutionalized legal systems. The former illustrates the uniqueness and vulnerability of individuals, while the latter illustrates an institutionalized logic of exchange. Bertolino argues that the legal voice creates a logic of exchange where resentful institutions are only interested in the conditions associated with wrongdoing, such as punishment. For Bertolino, the voice of individuals resist this legal approach to forgiveness, and by fostering the individual voice, we foster the creation of a space for an

inner-forgiveness that transcends the voice of legal institutions and retribution.

Continuing the focus on how forgiveness affects and manifests within individuals, Joshua M. Hall's "Twixt Mages and Monsters: Arendt on the Dark Art of Forgiveness" discusses the "magical" nature of forgiveness. Couched in Hannah Arendt's understanding of personal subjectivity and forgiveness, Hall offers a strategic new interpretation of Arendt, one that maintains we should understand seemingly unforgivable acts as merely a failure of imagination. Hall argues that we should interpret Arendt as suggesting we expand our imaginative powers to see "unforgivable" wrongdoers as insufficiently unimaginative, which allows us to reimagine them as beings whom we are willing and able to forgive. To support this conclusion, Hall provides a provocative reading of Arendt that couches her use of "mental imagery" in terms of a type of mental "magic." In the end, the inability to forgive is an inability to use one's mind to "magically" reimagine the world.

Since the focus of Hall's chapter is on the unforgivable, it is appropriate to be followed by Adrian Switzer's "Im/possible Forgiveness: Derrida on Cosmopolitan Hospitality." Switzer's chapter focuses on Jacques Derrida's *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, and examines the relationship between im/possible forgiveness and current global cosmopolitan issues. More specifically, he uses a narrative-style approach centered on the real-life death of Aylan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian refugee found dead on the shore of Bodrum, Turkey, to show that the sovereign right of forgiveness illustrates that we are all refugees deserving of moral respect. According to Switzer, Kant's Cosmopolitanism shows that we are all citizens of the Earth, and when coupled with the im/possibility of forgiveness, there is an unconditional demand to extend hospitality (i.e. forgiveness) to all those in need.

Zachary Thomas Settle's "Indeterminable Forgiveness: Economic Madness and The Possibility of an Impossible

Task” continues our examination of Derrida by providing an in-depth analysis of Derrida’s position that “pure” forgiveness is the possibility of the impossible. Settle brings clarity to Derrida’s examination of the required absolute encounter between the Self and the Other, showing that Derrida’s “forgiveness” is marked by hospitality and justice, which opens itself up to an unforeseen possibility of the impossible (i.e. forgiveness), a process perpetually underway and never complete.

The volume concludes with Jeff Lambert’s examination of forgiveness in G.W.F. Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Lambert’s “Absolute Forgiveness, Material Intimacy and Recognition in Hegel” provides a detailed argument for how best to understand the crucial moment of forgiveness in Hegel’s text. According to Lambert, the initial moment of forgiveness is deficient because it lacks recognition of the intimacy between Substance and Subject, which runs counter to the interpretations offered by Catherine Malabou and John Russon. Since the initial moment of forgiveness only involves Subject, the Spirit’s journey towards the recognition of Substance must continue. By providing a careful analysis of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Lambert shows that the moment of Substantial recognition associated with forgiveness does not occur until the final section, “Absolute Knowing.”

As you can tell from this brief summary, there is a lot of conceptual ground to be covered. It has been a pleasure to work on this volume, and I would like to thank the contributing authors for their willingness to push themselves and readers in new directions. With that said, I will leave you to your explorations.

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